

Making a job of birdwatching at the beach

This story is one in a series about summer jobs in the South Shore.

BY JENNIFER ARTHUR
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For Corey Wisneski of Duxbury, standing on the beach for eight hours a day is for the birds.

Wisneski is a piping plover monitor. She stands guard over plover nests to make sure the birds are not harmed by humans or predators.

The monitors also play a vital role in keeping track of the plover population. The birds were placed on the federal endangered species list in 1986. In 1987, the state plover population was only 131 pairs. Because of the state's protective measures, the plover population is now nearly 500 pairs.

Wisneski, who monitors the birds in Duxbury, said she enjoys her job.

"It's a relaxing job, especially if you like birds and the beach," she said.

Fellow Duxbury resident and plover monitor Jennifer Dunn agreed.

"It's an enjoyable environment," she said.

Monitors work 40 hours a week watching and following the 7-inch birds as they forage around their nests. Monitors make sure the birds are not harmed by unleashed dogs, vehicles and predators such as foxes.

Such vigilance is necessary because the plovers — small and sandy colored — blend in with the beach sand. People can run over them or walk right into a nest without knowing it.

"If you didn't know what you were looking for, you would step right on

them," Wisneski said.

The Massachusetts Audubon Society has 45 plover monitors, 12 of whom are paid. Duxbury and Plymouth employ their own monitors.

Audubon volunteers receive free housing for the duration of their work, which starts when the birds arrive near the beginning of April and ends when they migrate at the end of August. Paid employees receive about \$7 an hour. Duxbury

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monitors start at minimum wage and receive a yearly increase.

The arrival of the plovers and the accompanying enforcement of restrictions aimed at protecting them are not always welcomed by beach-goers.

"People really have an attitude about clearing the beach," Dunn said. Sometimes people get so angry that they refuse to move from the protected areas.

"You just have to say, 'I'm just doing my job. I have nothing against you. I'm just doing my duty,'" Wisneski said.

Situate plover monitor Heidi Krajewski of Canada said attitudes have improved as people have become more educated about the threat to the birds.

Krajewski said people "are usually willing to help the birds" once they have been told why access to certain

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arens is restricted.

Many monitors said they were drawn to the job because of their interest in the environment and are now seeking careers in the environmental field.

Wisneski, who graduated from Boston University with a degree in anthropology this year, plans to go to graduate school to study environmental biology in 2000.

Dunn, an English major at Tufts University, said that because of her job as a monitor, she hopes to incorporate the environment into her career plans.

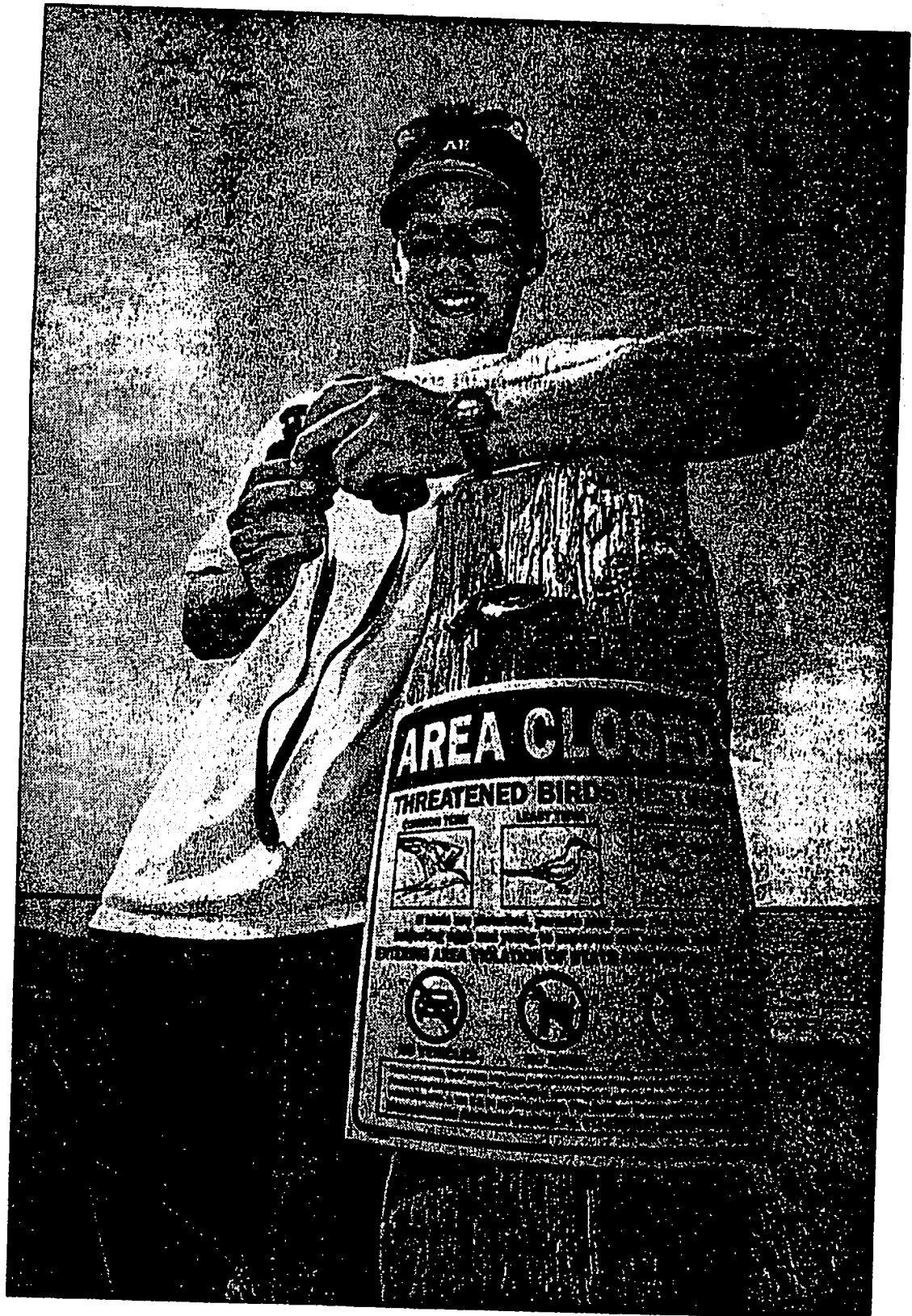
Krajewski will be a senior biology major at the University of Victoria in British Columbia.

"It's really great, because I'm interested in birds," she said of her volunteer position as a monitor.

People interested in being plover monitors can contact the Massachusetts Audubon Society or the town they hope to work in.

Scott Hecker, the director of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Coastal Waterbird Program, said Audubon looks for people interested in environmental issues.

"We need to know that they are dedicated to this sort of thing," he said.



GREG DERR/The Patriot Ledger

Ryan Kaufman of Duxbury works as a monitor of piping plovers at Duxbury Beach.